



# Multicultural Education:

## Teacher Conceptualization and Approach to Implementation

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### Introduction

Generally, teachers are able to recognize and identify children's cultural and linguistic differences. Sometime throughout their career, most teachers read diversity educational literature, purchase culturally inclusive instructional resources, attend professional development workshops, and/or take courses in their teacher credential programs. However, developing the skills needed to sustain and apply multicultural understandings in classrooms can be, at times, illusive.

While teachers can acknowledge the importance of diversity, competency in classrooms is often determined by the their ability to create conditions that enable students to learn. While theorizing of diversity ideologies in education instills hope of improving the quality of schooling for more children (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000); many underserved students continue to face severe academic and

social problems in our public schools. Therefore, it is not surprising that multiculturalists concede that the application of multicultural theory to schooling is often inconsistent and ineffective (Gay, 1995; Sleeter, 2001).

While the commitment to address diversity issues is seemingly pervasive in the field of education, a formidable chasm among the promises of multicultural education, the intentions of teacher educators, the skills of teachers, and the realities of achievement outcomes for underrepresented children persists (Sheets, 2003). The widespread information about diversity, evident in the abundance of publications, position papers, conferences, and teacher preparation requirements does not seem to influence the achievement of underrepresented children attending public schools (Sleeter, 2001).

Assumptions can be made that most teachers in the field act with the best intentions and much of the responsibility for improving the learning outcomes of diverse children lies with teachers. This study examines teacher conceptualization of multicultural education and describes their approaches to implementation.

A case study of two kindergarten teachers in an urban public school in Northern California uses a collaborative approach to investigate the issues contributing to the multicultural theory-practice gap. The article is divided into four parts: methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

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### Research Design

This research used a teacher-inquiry approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) and followed rigorous qualitative methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Silverman, 1993). Teacher-inquiry provided a non-threatening approach for teachers to question their positions about culture and examine their practice. In this case, teacher-inquiry helped teachers identify their cultural knowledge, acknowledge the diversity present in their classrooms, and construct meanings to their pedagogical responses to the particular diversity elements in their classrooms.

### Participants

The two kindergarten teachers, selected from a single school, met the study's requirements—minimum of ten years teaching experience and exposure to at least one university/college course and one inservice workshop on diversity. Claire (Chinese American) and Gwen (European American), each taught 20 children in separate, adjacent rooms. They planned collaboratively and often grouped children for various activities.<sup>1</sup>

Claire (Chinese American), in her early-forties, is bilingual (Cantonese/English), has a Cantonese bilingual credential, and 15 years teaching experience. The children in Claire's class include: 16 Chinese Americans, one Danish American, one

Armenian American, and two European Americans. Twelve of the children were labeled, English Language Learners (ELL). Gwen (European American), in her mid-fifties, has a Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate and has also taught for 15 years. The children in Gwen's class were: 14 Chinese Americans, three European Americans, one Russian American, one Japanese American, and one Vietnamese American. Twelve children were identified as ELL.

## Setting

The study took place in an urban public elementary school in Northern California. District records show that the total student population (767 students) included: 1.5% African American, 0% Native American, 46.5% Chinese American, 1.9% Filipino American, 2.3% Japanese American, 2.3% Korean American, 3.6% Latino American, 16.3% Other Non-White American and 21.8% Other White American.

The school was one of the more desirable schools in the district. In 2002, fourth graders in this school scored 68 points in reading and 84 points in math compared to the district mean of 47 points for reading and 60 points for math in the standardized Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9).

## Data Sources

The data sources included a questionnaire, teacher interviews, and classroom observations guided by a Diversity Pedagogy Instrument (Sheets, 2000). The questionnaire, given at the beginning of the study inquired about participant teaching background, formal preparation in diversity, and how they conceptualized multicultural education. They were also asked to describe how their attempts to teach multiculturally were supported in the school.

The initial interview was used to explain the purpose of the study and to schedule classroom visits. The final interview encouraged reflection on possible issues hindering and/or advancing implementation of multicultural theory. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informal conversations (during recess and after school) provided another invaluable data source.

The observations took place during an afternoon 40-minute "Plan, Do, and Review" activity where children selected from a broad range of offerings: social, hands-on (e.g., dramatic play, art), manipulatives (e.g., Lego, board games), and academic (e.g., reading, computer, math games) ac-

tivities. The classroom observations documented the children's choices, social interactions, and related teacher responses.

The Diversity Pedagogy Instrument was used to record teachers' and children's complementary behaviors (Sheets, 2000). Diversity pedagogical behaviors were identified as teaching practices that adapt instruction and curriculum in response to the cultural knowledge and experiences of children. Children's cultural displays were identified as behaviors that revealed culturally influenced competencies, behaviors, and attitudes.

## Data Analysis

The data, organized and analyzed according to procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984), utilized data reduction and data display to draw and verify emerging conclusions from multiple data sources (triangulation). In the first phase of data reduction, an initial coding scheme with keywords and phrases identified the types of possible teacher conceptualizations of multicultural education. The same process labeled and coded children's cultural displays.

The key words and phrases from both sets of data were color coded, further reduced, and recorded on two separate matrices as data displays. Recording the categories generated by the data on teacher conceptualization of multicultural education and children's cultural displays graphically on a matrix allowed an examination of the emerging themes visually. Conclusion drawing and verification involved a careful analysis of the emerging patterns.

The sequence of the events followed the procedures suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984). A brief questionnaire, given at the initial interview was followed by weekly classroom observations (six) and informal conversations. The field notes generated during the observations were reviewed and reduced regularly for emergent themes and to provide a focus on possible topics for the final interview. Data from the final interview provided an in-depth analysis of the teachers' conceptualization and implementation of a diversity pedagogy.

## Reliability of Information

The small sample size and short duration period are limitations of this study. The findings reflect these limitations and can only be generalized to this sample. Additionally, since multicultural education may be perceived as controversial, and teachers may feel uncomfortable, unin-

formed, and/or sensitive when discussing diversity issues, the reliability of the information, particularly during the interviews, could be compromised if the teachers felt compelled to offer perceived socially acceptable and/or politically correct responses. This effect was minimized by establishing a cordial and trusting relationship with the teachers, an emphasis on collaboration, and the use of multiple data sources (triangulation).

## Findings

Trained in early childhood methods, these experienced teachers were keen observers of the children's behavior. They used a child-centered teaching approach. While they expressed desire to implement multicultural theory, they considered multicultural education burdensome, confusing, intrusive, and frustrating. They viewed their teaching skills as developmental and welcomed the inquiry/collaborative approach as a way to improve their practice.

Their cultural knowledge and linguistic skills directly influenced the ways the teachers implemented specific diversity pedagogical dimensions (Sheets, 2000) in the classroom. For example, the diversity pedagogical dimension on language expansion and maintenance was experienced differently by teachers and children.

While both teachers valued language acquisition and encouraged second language development, Claire (3<sup>rd</sup> generation Chinese American, Cantonese native speaker) selectively used Cantonese in the classroom, while Gwen (European American, English native speaker) used American Sign Language (ASL) and short phrases in other languages (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Spanish) to encourage multiple language development.

The findings organized in three sections include: (1) classroom context, (2) classroom vignettes, and (3) barriers and insights hindering and/or advancing implementation of a diversity ideology.

## Classroom Context

The "Plan, Do, and Review" was a free choice period. It involved the self-selection of friends and activities. The children often worked and played in small groups of two or three.

### Gwen's Classroom

The walls in this large, attractive classroom were covered with children's artwork and photos of recent field trips. Bright rugs

and a comfortable reading sofa gave it a home-like atmosphere. A substantial collection of accessible resources provided children with math manipulatives, puzzles, games, art materials, and books and posters in Chinese, Spanish, English, and American Sign Language (ASL). A colorful poster of a poem *Entre Dos Idiomas* (Between Two Languages) printed in both Spanish and English was positioned eye-level in the reading area. Large ASL cards in seven hand skin tones stretched across the back wall.

During "Plan, Do, and Review," Gwen circulated around the room. She organized library books, helped children set up group activities (e.g., painting a mural), and when invited joined children in board games. She was relaxed and warm with the children. They often walked up and hugged her. The emotional safety in Gwen's classroom encouraged children to develop friendly and respectful social interactions among themselves.

### Claire's Classroom

While Gwen's classroom was larger than usual, Claire's classroom, formally a faculty office, was quite small. This inviting classroom also offered multiple resources—a play kitchen, four computers, shelves with math manipulatives, puzzles, and board games. A large bookcase full of multicultural children's literature and a collection of posters filled one wall.

The ASL alphabet was prominently placed over the blackboard and a wall hanging with a picture of diverse children hung from the front door. Child made Chinese paper lanterns and valentines were strung across the room. The play kitchen had a set of Chinese plates, bowls and teacups as well as regular dishes, plastic pizza and spaghetti.

Claire spent this period at a small table working with individual children reviewing letters and sounds from worksheets. She maintained a formal relationship with the children; however, the children were relaxed, happy, and comfortable. In this classroom, there was less socializing behavior and more task-related interactions such as small individual lessons and work completion. Claire, kind but firm, often gave direct instructions.

### Classroom Vignettes

While the teachers struggled with how to teach multiculturally, the children freely displayed their own expressions of culture. In structured play, storytelling, and recess, children initiated dialogue about culture and demonstrated culturally influenced

behaviors identified by Sheets (2000) as cultural displays. According to Sheets, these behaviors reflect and display the competencies valued in the children's home culture; and, as such, can provide teachers with valuable information to enhance the teaching-learning process.

The following vignettes illustrate how children spontaneously expressed and communicated culturally meaningful information. Teacher and peer responses to these cultural initiatives are also noted.

#### *"Do You Speak Chinese?"*

The children sat on the rug. While Gwen explained an upcoming field trip, Ben (Chinese American) crawled towards me [first author], gently bumping his head against me several times before settling down. When circle ended, Ben asked, "Do you speak Chinese?" I answered, "Yes." He further inquired, "Do you speak Japanese?" I said, "I know some Japanese." He pressed, "Do you speak Mandarin?" I said, "No. Do you speak any languages?" He smiled and responded, "I speak Chinese," and went off to play.

Ben was aware of the visitor's Asian racial markers. He wanted to know what languages this person spoke and at the same time decided to let her know that he spoke Chinese. Ben supplied information about his linguistic skills and inquired about the adult's linguistic knowledge.

#### *"Everyone Has a Chinese Name."*

Sean's grandfather (Irish American) volunteers in Gwen's classroom. Irene (Chinese American) asks Grandfather, "What is your Chinese name?" Grandfather replies, "I don't have a Chinese name." Irene insists, "Everyone has a Chinese name. Your name is *Goong-Goong* (*Goong-Goong*, means grandfather in Cantonese).

In her interaction with Sean's grandfather, Irene established a personal cultural frame-of-reference by giving him both a name and a familial role—something she understood. This in turn, connected him to her cultural understandings and definition of grandfather.

#### *"Hopanyo, Hopanyo, Sagwa!"*

Amanda (Chinese American), Nicole (Armenian American) and Deanna (Danish American) sit and draw in Claire's classroom. Nicole softly sings "The Sagwa Song" about a Mandarin-speaking kitten from a children's

television program. Nicole is mispronouncing most of the simple lyrics. Deanna, bilingual (Danish/English) repeats the song in nearly flawless Mandarin. (Deanna openly embraces the Chinese culture and proudly tells that she was named after a queen in Denmark. A week earlier she came to school dressed in a bright red and gold Chinese outfit purchased in Chinatown for the Chinese New Year). Deanna politely tells Nicole that they sing the song "differently." Nicole responds: "My TV sings it differently." Then Nicole asks Amanda, "What's your favorite song?" Without pausing, Amanda belts out a Cantonese version of "My Darling Clementine."

Beyond discussion of the corrected version of a song, the children express a willingness to share and explore their background experiences. This knowledge is shared without defensiveness and competitiveness. The interaction, an extension of play, demonstrates a desire to establish and share a cultural frame-of-reference, in this case, one's favorite song.

### ***Barriers and insights to Diversity Pedagogy***

This section is divided into two parts: barriers to implementation and insights to implementation. Each is discussed.

### ***Barriers to implementation***

#### **Lack of Definition**

The teachers believed that no one "really knows what multicultural education is." They concluded that this lack of agreement or consensus on a definition caused the confusion leading to fragmentation or dismissal in the field. Gwen noted that the constant "debate and discussion" about multicultural education left her "dumbfounded." She describes her "multicultural" teaching as "choppy." Claire, unsure about what multicultural education means, wondered if it meant "setting aside a specific time of the day or not setting a particular time." She thinks out loud—"maybe we just incorporate it into our curriculum."

During discussions, both teachers used a broad application of multiculturalism. The terms "multicultural," "cross-cultural," "global," and "universal" were used interchangeably. According to these teachers, multicultural could mean "hundreds

of cultures" (e.g., Chinese culture, feminist culture, and individual culture). Teaching about different world cultures and teaching differently to culturally diverse children were viewed as a single construct. For example, the discussion of ways to incorporate multicultural curricular content included topics such as taking the children to see a performance of Balinese dance and recognizing children's different learning preferences.

Without a clear understanding of multicultural education, the unquestioned expectation of compliance created defensive responses that further compounded confusion. The teachers described multicultural education as just another forced "set of standards." Gwen felt all standards seem "prearranged or predetermined." She maintained that "the art of education [teaching] cannot thrive this way [forcing standards on teachers]." Claire felt her teaching would simply end up "following district's mandated schedules [for curricular content]."

The teachers' misconceptions affected their ability to recognize their own responses to the role of culture in their teaching, and undermined confidence in their efforts to teach multiculturally. In the initial interview, when asked about their multicultural teaching practice, Gwen blurted, "I don't do anything cultural" and Claire stated, "I don't have time for multicultural education."

Several times during informal conversations, Claire stated that she often feels that she does not know whether or not she is teaching multiculturally, but guessed that she might be "without realizing it." Gwen stated: "Inside of me, I feel there's a cross-cultural education going on . . . [but] I'm not doing what I believe is . . . [multicultural education]."

## Sociological in Nature

The teachers felt overwhelmed and resentful that the classroom was viewed "by others" as a place to address societal issues (e.g., racism, homelessness, violence, drugs). They saw these requirements in the curriculum directly related to multiculturalism. They felt teachers were expected to carry the burden of solving the country's political and social problems through multicultural education. Acknowledging that the U.S. is a racist society and that societal issues affect children, these teachers felt that the solution to those issues rested on multiple social agencies—family, community, churches, government—not teachers who are prepared "to teach."

Claire believed that everyone should

determine where they stand on various social and political issues; however, she stated that she was not a social activist nor politically inclined. Regarding socio-political issues, Gwen felt it was absurd to train teachers to become activists. She concluded, "It's a big society problem. That means changing our culture [the U.S. culture]. It doesn't mean changing a teacher."

## Cultural Knowledge

Differences among language skills, cultural knowledge, and experiential backgrounds of teachers and children coupled with the ability to use personal knowledge and experiences in the classroom influenced the teachers' perception of how to implement multicultural education in their classrooms. While they both understood the need to acknowledge differences in classroom instruction, they identified different children's needs and responded accordingly.

For example, Claire's shared cultural knowledge, linguistic skills, and similar childhood experiences with half of the children in her class and bilingual teaching preparation influenced her practice. She remembered learning English in primary school: "Maybe because I was a second language learner, my first language was Chinese, and understanding my background, I can pretty much understand how the students are learning English."

She particularly focused on developing the written and spoken language skills of the 12 ELL students in her class. While children were independently participating in the "Plan, Do, and Review," Claire worked with individual children having difficulties with letter and sound concepts. She made deliberate efforts to ensure 'proper' English pronunciation. For example, working with a small group of Chinese boys, Claire emphasized that "Eskimo" was not "Ask-ki-mo" and "octopus" was not pronounced "ah-to-pus." The children practiced enunciating words.

Claire believed that recognition of the children's home culture helped children be "proud to be who they are." Claire consciously linked children's prior cultural and linguistic knowledge to new concepts. For example, in an individual lesson when Patrick (Chinese American) could not connect the letter "g" to the picture of a giraffe, Claire asked him if he knew the Chinese word for giraffe. Claire then switched to Cantonese to find out if Patrick understood the concept "giraffe." Her fluency in Cantonese was an asset used selectively and effectively to assess the children's content knowledge and skill level.

Claire saw multicultural education as "being aware and understanding that students come from different backgrounds and cultures and [understanding] that they may need different types of learning tools." Gwen viewed multicultural practice as "children of different cultural backgrounds getting to know each other, learning to play, work, and work out conflicts together." She focused on enhancing socialization opportunities among the children and saw her role as promoting cross-cultural relationships and awareness and understanding of differences.

Gwen (European American) who did not share a cultural background with the majority of the children in her class was astutely aware of this difference. She often marveled at how the Cantonese-speaking children would swiftly focus on their work after a short Cantonese phrase from Claire. However, being resourceful, Gwen used her own knowledge and strengths to foster what she valued. Since she encouraged first language maintenance and viewed languages as different forms of communication, she found ways to enrich classroom communication.

During one classroom observation, Takeshi (a rather loud and rambunctious Japanese American boy) offered her some 'food' from a basket stuffed with an assortment of plastic foods. Gwen thinking aloud commented on her limited Japanese as she decided what language to use to thank Takeshi. She smiled and said "Arigato!" (Thank you, Japanese); then, added, "Sayonara" (Goodbye, Japanese). Takeshi moved on with the basket, turned back, and replied, "Gracias!" (Thank you, Spanish).

Gwen's child-centered teaching approach and strong observational skills helped her respond to the diversity in her classroom. She often commented that she took cues from the children. In a discussion about how to decide what to incorporate in a multicultural curriculum, Gwen commented: "The kids do it for us. If you take those opportunities . . . if we're sensitive and value them [children's cues] . . . if we follow the children's lead, they can tell us a lot."

## insights to implementation

### Practice as Evolving

These teachers, each with 15-years teaching experience, understood that their practice improved with hard work, new knowledge, and experience. Aware of how they developed as educators (e.g., reflection, collaboration, professional development, classroom experiences, observation

of children's behaviors, acceptance of and experimenting with new approaches, resources, and ideas) they recognized that their understanding of multicultural education affected its implementation.

Claire believed that there were multiple approaches to multicultural education. She explained: "You have to be aware of it. [It's] a little part of everything. I don't think there's just one way" then added, "you have to find out where you are and what would be the best way for you."

Gwen, conscious of the range of her cultural and linguistic knowledge, acknowledged her inability to communicate in Chinese to the parents during teacher conferences. Therefore, she learned to use concise words and phrases in the comments section of the written report card to parents. She felt this would meet the needs of parents who do not read English and who may use a translator to explain their child's achievement.

Gwen assumed responsibility for her professional growth. For example, following a conversation about culturally responsive teaching, she reflected on her contributions to the discussion: "It's not a complete answer. It's just a beginning of an answer. It's just something for me to think about."

## Desire To Implement

Both teachers expressed concern about the theory-practice gap and expressed a desire to find solutions for the perceived issues in their classrooms. Gwen described the need to teach all of the children equitably in all subject areas—"making it equitable and accessible to all children." She commented, "you have to back up and say, 'Well, that's not working for this one, or that one whether it's in language or in math.'"

They recognized opportunities to include more multicultural aspects in their teaching. Gwen stated how certain experiences would be "good for her" and how the knowledge gained would help "bring more culture" into her classroom. Claire followed up on issues raised in previous classroom visits. For example, to improve home-school communication, she went through her files, found, and reviewed a parent questionnaire given at the beginning of the school year.

## Teacher-Inquiry

The use of teacher-inquiry, which values teacher knowledge, provided these teachers with a process to address their frustration and efforts to implement multicultural education. Gwen commented, "Of course you want teachers to be aware,

but they [multicultural theorists] have grandiose, wonderful, utopian ideas. What can we really do in the here and now?"

Teacher-inquiry also offered a non-threatening approach to dialogue. Gwen stated, "Just being involved in this project makes you a little bit more aware, in a nice way. Not like somebody's watching you or like there's this book you have to read or standards you have to comply with." She was glad that "experts and corporations" were not involved in the study, adding that she "would appreciate it if theorists were actually teachers in the classroom."

The teachers valued the exchange of concerns and ideas and found meeting together to discuss issues [as done in the study] helpful. They were able to openly examine their interpretations and responses to attempts to implement multicultural experiences in their classrooms.

For example, Claire openly questioned her decision to encourage Deanna's (Danish American) mother to sing a Danish birthday song at her classroom birthday party. Deanna had explicitly opposed her mother's offer and covered her ears while her mother sang.

## Collaborative Approach

A collaborative style characterized these teachers' established method of sharing resources and teaching strategies. Claire and Gwen shared a single classroom with forty children last year which required extensive curricular planning. Although they were in separate classrooms during this study, they planned a major portion of their curriculum together.

The reciprocal, natural, day-to-day, curricular, collaborative process contributed to the teachers' knowledge of culture. Sometimes the curricular content focused on cultural traditions—Claire explained rituals and symbols related to the Chinese New Year and Gwen organized classroom presentations and activities for Martin Luther King Day and Presidents' Day.

They also discussed cultural issues affecting instruction, such as how to address the Chinese American parents' use of "criticism" to motivate their children to achieve more in school. Gwen, aware of Claire's cultural knowledge, suggested that Claire (third-generation Chinese American) present a workshop to "really educate a lot of people who don't know about what is going on at home for a lot of our children."

## Discussion

This study examined why teachers experience difficulties implementing multicultural education. We maintain that acknowledging the problem of implementation is essential to advancing teachers' pedagogical efforts. Significant findings of this study were teacher perception of a broad range of interpretations of what actually constitutes multicultural educational theory and the association of multicultural education with a curriculum dominated by societal problems.

These perspectives resulted in confusion, frustration, and disengagement. Teachers saw multicultural education as another subject they had to cover with their limited instructional time with children. It was just another pressure to comply with State and district mandated standards which they felt had little or no connection to the teaching-learning process. This perception promoted reasonable decisions to question and ultimately disregard the recommendations of theorists and experts outside of their immediate school setting.

These teachers' conceptionalization of multicultural education also undermined their ability to recognize the ways in which they acknowledged the role of culture in the teaching-learning process. The teachers initially disowned any relationship between multicultural education and their practice. They devalued and doubted their own knowledge, skills, and efforts.

Yet, the teachers' cultural background, linguistic knowledge, personal and professional experiences, habits of reflection, highly developed observational skills, and child-centered approach to learning provided them with rich, accessible resources.

For example, Claire, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, was fluent in Cantonese and experienced schooling as an English Language Learner (ELL). This insider knowledge affected her teaching. She selectively used Cantonese to develop the language and communication skills of the ELL learners in her class.

Gwen, whose cultural and linguistic background differed from most of the children in her class, drew upon her own strengths and effectively used the skills and knowledge that were at her disposal. For example, she consistently used American Sign Language as a tool to promote second language learning and often responded with appropriate phrases in multiple languages as a way to foster a respect for different languages.

The classroom vignettes—revealing what Sheets (2000) calls cultural displays clearly demonstrated the importance of

recognizing and responding to children's behaviors. In each case, child-initiated dialogues pointed out how children established a personal cultural frame-of-reference to the different social, academic, and linguistic situations they encountered.

The children's cultural displays were a strong indication that the children's personal cultural knowledge is, in effect, a kind of language or a work/play representation used to express different aspects of their awareness and development. These openly displayed expressions of culture reflected competencies that provided teachers with valuable information regarding children's prior knowledge.

Claire and Gwen used this knowledge—cues from the children's behavior—to make instructional decisions. They were consciously and culturally responsive to the interests, needs, and values of the children when selecting shared reading books, designing the activities for learning centers, displaying children's work, and making decisions affecting time allotted to particular activities.

## Conclusion

While a conceptual understanding of multicultural education and personal values aligned to issues of diversity are essential, it is also important to acknowledge the complexity of the teaching-learning process and developmental process teachers experience as they move from novice to expert level. Knowledge of the ways children and teachers learn and the ability to *conditionalize cultural knowledge*—to apply and translate it to practice—is required.

Despite experiential, cultural, and linguistic differences between teachers and children, teachers, even at a novice level, can be taught to notice children's understandings of teaching-learning events.

Teachers can learn to consciously develop thinking skills—habits of mind—to increase awareness of their own understandings, cultural positions, and filters through which they view culture, language, class, ethnicity. Likewise, instructors of multicultural foundational courses can focus course content on schooling issues rather than sociological problems. Additionally, support to teachers must extend beyond the teacher preparation stage.

To address the theory-practice gap in diversity requires that those who prepare teachers understand the developmental nature of teacher knowledge and pedagogy. Centering the content of diversity courses in the field of education and psychology, rather than sociology, might better prepare teachers to recognize and respond to children's competencies and needs and to adapt their instruction and curriculum accordingly. The teachers in this study wanted culturally relevant knowledge and realistic approaches to the teaching-learning process, yet they felt unsupported.

The following suggestions may help bridge the theory-practice gap:

1. Future teacher preparation course work and inservice professional development can explore ways to help teachers identify and use their personal cultural knowledge and pedagogical strengths to create, develop, and implement curriculum and instruction responsive to children's prior cultural knowledge.
2. Teacher-inquiry and collaborative approaches can be utilized as viable methods to encourage thinking and instill in teachers habits of continual, critical reflection on self, students, and curriculum.
3. Educational researchers can link teacher behaviors and children's

achievement outcomes; and, in collaboration with classroom teachers co-construct what "multicultural education" might mean in school settings.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> All names used in this study are pseudonyms. The Chinese American teacher, Claire was given a mainstream pseudonym because she used a mainstream name in her teaching practice.

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